DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 219 421 TM 820 433

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TITLE Attitudes and Attained English Language Proficiency of University Students in Thailand: A Sociolinguistic Study.
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (66th, New York, NY, March 19-23, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Measures; Cloze Procedure; College Students; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Language Attitudes; *Language Proficiency; Second Language Learning; *Sociolinguistics; *Student Attitudes; Thai
IDENTIFIERS *Thailand

ABSTRACT

English proficiency of Thai university students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) was studied in relation to attitudinal scores on social, economic, travel, or prestige scales. Secondarily, the subjects' attitudes toward their native group and toward the target language group, and their motives for learning English were studied in relationship to their attained level of proficiency. Characteristics of the learners, including sex, status in school, and numbers of years studying English were studied as moderator variables. A cloze test of English proficiency and a student questionnaire adapted from Chihara and Oller were administered to 52 females and 61 males by 2 teachers at a national university in Thailand. Results show positive correlations between factors distilled from the attitude measures and attained EFL proficiency. High ratings of one's own people on selected attribute scales correlated negatively with foreign language proficiency. Sex differences were found in terms of motivations to study English. (Author/PN)

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Attitudes and Attained English Language Proficiency of University Students in Thailand: A Sociolinguistic Study

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Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, March 1982.

TM820433

ABSTRACT

Measures intended to assess attitudes of Thai students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) toward Thais, toward English speakers, toward travel to an English speaking country, and finally toward learning English are studied in relation to attained EFL proficiency. A cloze test of English proficiency and a student questionnaire adapted from Chihara and Oller were administered to fifty-two females and sixty-one males by two teachers at a national university in Thailand. Results show positive correlations between factors distilled from the attitude measures and attained EFL proficiency. Sex differences were found in terms of motivations to study English.

1.

Attitude and Attained English Language Proficiency of University Students in Thailand: A Sociolinguistic Study

The main question investigated in this paper is whether an English proficiency score of Thai university students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is significantly correlated with attitudinal scores on social, economic, travel, or prestige scales. Secondarily, the investigators determine whether indirect questions concerning subjects' attitudes toward their native group and toward the target language group are better predictors of the attained level of proficiency than direct questions concerning motives to learn English as a foreign language. And finally, the investigators consider whether characteristics of the learners including sex, status in school, and numbers of years studying English make a difference in how significantly attitudes relate to proficiency.

Inquiring whether attitudes toward a target language group are related to learning the language is logically justified (Dewey, 1938) because the relation has historically a verifiable existence for royalty no matter how hypothetical for students. Louis XIV made Paris the star of Europe, his court sparkling with Corneille, Racine, Moliere, LaFontaine,Descartes, Pascal, and others. Frederick the Great,

an ardent admirer of this French culture (Issawi, 1981), sponsored French essays for the academy of Berlin. In Russia, as Tolstoy reports in War and Peace French was the language of the aristocratic circle of Saint Petersburg.

From 1851 of the same century, Chakri kings of Thailand, assessing Western influences, accomodated to both French and English. In the last decade of the nineteenth century during the reign of Chulalongkorn, the Thai government had as financial advisor an Englishman, as foreign advisor an American, and as legal advisor a Frenchman. Mongkut, fourth king of the Chakri dynasty and predecessor of Chulalongkorn, started Thai people toward some accomodation with westernization. Thai means free and Thailand has never been a colony. King Mongkut imported English governess Mrs Anna Leonowens as tutor for his children. [And any Thai knows the Rodgers and Hammerstein characterization of King Mongkut in King and I musical is false. He never burned anyone alive; far from being lewd, he ascended the throne after nearly twenty years in a monastery; and he never fell in love with Anna who left Siam before he died. Small wonder the movie version of The King and I was banned in Bangkok.] His majesty King Bhumibol, or Rama the Ninth, who is an accomplished jazz clarinetist, speaks German and Italian as well as English and French. In short, favorable attitudes of the royal family of Thailand toward western ways are associated with

royal family proficiency in English and other western languages.

Why is it so important to know what the royal Thai family likes? One thing is the prestige royal preferences have in a country whose uniformity is more apparent than real. Thais speak different dialects, worship various forms of Buddhism, and have different ethnic origins. Diversity of culture and economy is unavoidable. Thailand is diverse in landscape and climate. The North is mountainous with large, populous, fertile valleys and flat lands appropriate for growing teak, tobacco, and highland dry rice. The South is equatorial rich in rubber, tin, and tropical agriculture. The Central region, the country's heartland, is a great alluvial delta formed by the Chao Phraya River capable of growing enough rice to make Thailand a leading exporter. In Bangkok, the most wealthy city of the central plain a 1976 per capita income (20,111 Baht) was seven times much as the Northeast (3,141 Baht) (Royal Thai Embassy, 1977). The king unifies people sharply distinguished from one another and confers prestige on English. For another thing King Bhumibol sees by travel what it is expected a cultured person should see. He and Queen Sirikit desire to see as much of the world as possible - to travel to the next village, the next city, the next state, the next country, and the next continent, and to see what life is like there. This year

Queen Sirikit's trip to this country had a commercial motivation - she was here to promote the sale of Thai goods - but travel for the sake of travel is also in her background. The royal family confers prestige on travel for the sake of travel and the exchange of cultures.

For a last thing, royal preferences point a way to social and professional advancement. This study is not about learning English as a Second Language (ESL) but about learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In New York communities of Jackson Heights, Queens, the West Bronx, Long Island, and Yonkers, 15,000 Thais learn Thai to survive at home and English to survive at work. Mrs. Yupadee Chuchaitayakul organizes balls that raise money for one of the charities of Queen Sirikit and brings food every Sunday to monks at the Buddhist temple of Vajiradhammapadin off Burnside Avenue on the West Bronx while her husband Vichan Chuchaitayakul goes off to manage Bangkok 54, his restaurant in Manhattan. Mrs. Chuchaitayakuls explains, "It's nothing really special. We speak Thai. We talk about our homes. What is important is we stay together as Thais" (Ferretti, 1981). Thus, attitudes of the Chuchaitayakuls illustrate four or five of the categories into which Ganguly and Ornerod (1980) classify ESL attitudes among pupils of Asian origin. This paper is about EFL student attitudes to which perhaps all six categories apply:

1. Anxiety about performance of English at school

2. Value of use of English in total community
3. Suitability of use of English in religious observances
4. Role of home in encouraging English
5. A Pro-own language attitude
6. A linguistic motivation scale for professional and social advancement.

Previous research on the relationships between attitudes and attained language proficiency has produced two findings that are of interest for this study. First, relationships do exist between measures of attitudes and motives and attainment of language proficiency. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that direct and indirect questions have some utility for eliciting attitude information from Thai university students. Secondly, there is a difference between a foreign language context and a second language context (Chihara and Oller, 1978). Presumably, Thai students in a Thai university are basically exposed to the target language only in a formal classroom setting in contrast to subjects in a context where the target language is spoken all around them. Gardner (1980) has reviewed a large number of studies which have demonstrated relationships between second language achievement and attitudinal and motivational variables.

In the study reported in this paper we are concerned with subjects in a foreign language context. The main question investigated was whether or not responses to attitudinal questions - direct and indirect - are significantly correlated with cloze scores on the target language. Secondarily, we want to see if patterns of correlation between attitude measures and cloze measured proficiency are similar for female and male foreign language learners. Finally, we are interested in finding out whether the Chihara and Oller (1978) result of no difference in the utility of direct and indirect questions for eliciting attitude information is confirmed.

2. METHOD AND RESULTS

2.1 METHOD

2.1.1 Subjects.

Fifty-eight male and fifty female undergraduates representing twenty-two fields of study participated in this study. The wide range of academic disciplines is displayed in Table 1. Grades were represented by nine freshmen, forty-eight sophmores, thirty-five juniors, and sixteen seniors.

+----------------------------+
¶ ¶
¶ ¶
¶ Insert Table 1 about here. ¶
¶ ¶
¶ ¶
+----------------------------+

Years spent studying English ranged from one to seventeen with a mode of ten and an average of twelve.

2.1.2 Instruments

Each subject was asked to complete one demographic questionnaire of fifty-nine items, sixty identity questions, and a cloze test of 424 words with fifty deletions. The demographic questionnaire provided information about the student's sex, field of study, years studying English, school status, and language preference. The direct attitude questions also provided responses to measure four dimensions of attitude: (1) social, an index of the importance of getting to know English; (2) economic, an index concerned with the use of English for professional advancement; (3) travel interest index; and (4) prestige. The attitude questionnaire used by Chihara and Oller (1978) was adapted and interpreted in Thai. All the direct questions (adapted originally from Gardner and Lambert 1972) required a response on a five-point scale rating the importance of reasons for learning English or for traveling to an English speaking country. The indirect questions were in the form of two identity

scales consisting of adjectives such as "kind", "clever", "shy", etc.. Subjects were asked to indicate how well the adjectives described English speakers. The five-point scales ranged from "very much so", to "quite a bit", to "somewhat", to "a little", and "not at all". The Dale and Chall formula rated the passage as suitable for Grade 8 readers.

2.1.3 Procedure

Subjects in groups ranging from one to seventeen members were tested during laboratory periods. All subjects completed the demographic and attitude questionnaires and the cloze test. The cloze test was scored by the exact method.

2.2 RESULTS

Variables represented by fifty-nine direct demographic and attitude questions and sixty identity questions were grouped by principal component analysis into four factors that correlate significantly with the cloze test. Indirect questions formed factors correlating with the cloze test in the range from -.53 to -.63. Thais who rate Thais high on religious, broadminded, polite, helpful, friendly, calm, and cheerful adjectives tend to make a lower score on the cloze test. Thais who rate English-speaking people high in reasonableness, sociability, and enthusiasm also tend to get

lower scores on the cloze test. On the direct questions, Thais who see social, economic, travel, or prestige reasons for studying English tend to get a higher cloze score.

Thai females, more than males, see English study as useful for social and travel reasons. On the spear side, Thais see English as useful for economic and prestige reasons. The questions grouped as scales are listed in Table 3 and summary statistics are presented in Table 4. Factors correlating significantly with the cloze test are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Insert Table 3 about here.

Insert Table 4 about here.

Multiple regression was used to compare direct and indirect attitude questions as predictors of cloze scores.

Scores on the Interest in English factor were used as the direct question variable and scores on the Thai Religion factor were used as the indirect question variable. Both scores are useful predictors with the Thai Religious Identity score the better predictor. Principal component factor loadings on the Religion Identity and Interest in English scales are shown in Table 5 and the results of the multiple regression analysis are shown in Table 6.

Insert Table 5 about here.

Insert Table 6 about here.

3. CONCLUSIONS

A major assumption of this study is that cloze scores are a measure of language proficiency. Previous research shows cloze tests and reading comprehension and language proficiency tests exhibit high correlations. The practical implications for the foreign language teacher are the accessibilty in the form of cloze tests objective inexpensive, and easily constructed instruments for measuring language profi-

ciency. The central question being asked is: What relationship exists between scores on attitude measures and scores on the cloze test?

The results support two previous research findings. Attitude measures correlate highly with language proficiency measures and high ratings of one's own people on selected attribute scales correlated negatively (Chihara and Oller, 1978) with foreign language proficiency. The relative independence between Interest in English direct questions ($r=-.15$) means that they can be combined in order to improve prediction of foreign language proficiency over what would be achieved by considering either alone. A combination of direct and indirect questions in this study accounts for 45% of the variability in cloze score measures of foreign language proficiency. The implications of this degree of association are that teachers can treat students differently. They need not lecture on the benefits of learning English to students who see interest in English as important. On the other hand, students who rate Thais high on religion and associated attributes do need careful attention to develop their interest in another culture and its language. Since ethnic identity is complex, we conjecture that highly favorable ratings of one's own culture on selected attributes may be related to a lack of interest in another culture and its language. In this study, nearly twice as many Thais (67)

prefer Thai to Thai and English (38). Developing interest in another language is a persisting problem for language teachers.

Finally we have been struck by the low scores on standard cloze tests. Our attempts to score as correct acceptable and semantically appropriate responses as well as exact passage word entries did not change results nor improve predictions. Therefore, we recommend that further refinements to the cloze procedure include developing multiple choice alternatives, editing tasks for the deletion of randomly inserted extraneous words, and scoring of editing tasks for the partial knowledge necessary for not deleting correct words as extraneous.

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TABLE 1

Range of Academic Disciplines Represented by Undergraduates in a Thai University Taking English as a Foreign Language

(N=89)

Code	Discipline	Number	Code	Discipline	Number
1	Education	7	12	Arts	2
2	Fisheries	10	13	Forestry	1
3	Agriculture	12	14	French	2
4	Economics	17	15	Business	4
5	Food Science	1	16	Horticulture	3
6	Social Science	6	17	Cooperatives	1
7	Agronomy	7	18	Economics and Business	1
8	Physical Education	1	19	Geography	1
9	English	5	20	Accounting	1
10	Engineering	3	21	Chemistry	3
11	Sociology	1	44	Missing	19

TABLE 2

Intercorrelations and Summary Statistics of

Cloze, Direct and Indirect Attitude Scores

	1	2	3	4	5
	Cloze	Interest in English	Travel	Thai Identity	English speaking Identity
1.	1.00	.29	.35	-.63	-.53
2.	sss	1.00	.33	-.15	-.19
3.	sss	sss	1.00	-.23	-.21
4.	sss	N.S.	ss	1.00	.58
5.	sss	s	s	sss	1.00
N	112	113	113	113	113
Mean	11.45	18.80	17.98	10.88	21.92
S.D.	7.28	3.34	3.71	2.27	5.26
Range	0-28	11-25	6-25	4-15	12-30
P(r=0)					

s less than .05; ss less than .01; sss less than .001

TABLE 3

Questions Distinguishing Female and Male Thai

Reasons for Studying English as a Foreign Language

DIRECTIONS: What are your reasons concerning studying English as a foreign language? Please write the following statements as to how you agree or disagree:
SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; N-Neutral:D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree.

Prestige

Personal

1. To pass exams

What is your opinion about the degree of proficiency one attains as resulting from the following factors? A Person who does not succeed in gaining high scores in English tends to possess the following traits:

2. Because parents want me to.
3. To be the same level as those who have been abroad.

Social

1. Bangkok would be a much better city if more English speaking people moved here.
2. Lectures for all English courses should be given in English.
3. The person comes from a low income family whose parents do not deem English important.
4. The person comes from a less socially recognized family.

Economics

1 The person cannot afford to hire English speaking tutors.
2. The person cannot afford to see English films.
3. The person comes from a less socially recognized family.

Travel

Culture

Reasons for possible travel to an English speaking country

1. To get to live in another country.
2. To join a family member.
3. To find out about student life there.
4. To get to know many different kinds of people.

Friendship

1. To get to know English-speaking people.

Reasons concerning studying English as a foreign language.

¶ 2. To visit foreign countries. ¶
¶ 3. To have English-speaking friends. ¶
¶ A person who does not succeed in gaining high scores ¶
¶ in English tends to possess the following trait: ¶
¶ 4. The person receives no attention from English ¶
¶ teachers. ¶
¶Social ¶
¶ What are your reasons concerning studying English as a ¶
¶ foreign language? ¶
¶ 1. The more I know English-speaking people, the more ¶
¶ comfortable I feel being among them. ¶
¶ Reasons for possible travel to an English-speaking ¶
¶ country. ¶
¶ 2. To see the world. ¶
¶ 3. To get to know many different kinds of people. ¶
¶ A person who does not succeedin gaining high scores ¶
¶ in English tends to possess the following trait: ¶
¶ 4. The person always gets low scores in English ¶
¶ classes. ¶
¶ ¶
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TABLE 4

Summary Statistics on Questions Distinguishing Female and Male Thai Reasons for Studying English as a Foreign Language

Factor	N	Mean	S.D.	Range	T	$P(M_f - M_m)=0$
1. Economics						
Female	50	7.90	2.18	3-13	2.19	.03
Male	56	8.85	2.30	5-15		
2. Prestige						
Personal						
Female	49	8.34	2.30	4-13	2.25	.02
Male	55	9.36	2.29	4-14		
Social						
Female	47	10.17	3.07	4-17	2.57	.01
Male	56	11.67	2.82	6-18		
3. Social						
Female	50	14.70	1.86	11-19	2.10	.03
Male	57	13.94	1.82	9-17		
4. Travel						
Culture						
Female	50	14.26	2.52	7-20	3.40	.001
Male	56	12.56	2.58	7-18		
Friendship						
Female	48	15.00	2.58	7-20	2.18	.03
Male	52	13.92	2.52	7-20		

TABLE 5

Principal Component Varimax Solution Loadings for Direct and Indirect Question Items

Item	Loading
Direct Question Factor-Interest in English	
1. The person is not interested in English	.76
2. English is not necessary for the person's future career.	.66
3. I am interested in language, culture, and literature.	.50
4. The quality of the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) program offered in provincial schools is not comparable to one provided in Bangkok.	.47
Indirect Question Factor Thai Religious Identity	
1. Religious	.75
2. Broadminded	.74
3. Polite	.71
4. Helpful	.60
5. Friendly	.57
6. Calm	.54
7. Cheerful	.42

TABLE 6

Multiple Regression Predicting Cloze Score from Interest in English and Thai Religious Identity

	DF	SS	MS	F	P	R^2
Model	2	2664.04	1332.02	44.64	.0001	.45
Error	110	3281.94	29.84			
Total	112	5945.98				
Interest in English	1	502.30		16.84	.0001	
Thai Religious Identity	1	2161.74		72.45	.0001	

Appendix A

A PET TROUT

It is a likely story enough, as such things go, but there are points about it here and there which seem to require confirmation. I am told that is to a story well known and often repeated in Nova Scotia, but even that cannot be accepted as evidence of its entire truth. Being a fish-story it would seem to require something more. This is the tale as Charlie told it. "Once there was a half-breed Indian," he said, "who had a pet trout named Tommy, which he kept in a barrel. But the trout 1. (got) pretty big and had to have the 2. (water) changed a good deal to keep him 3. (alive). The Indian was too lazy to do 4. (that) and he thought he would teach the 5. (trout) to live out of water. So he 6. (did). He commenced by taking Tommy out of 7. (the) barrel for a few minutes at a 8. (time), pretty often, and then he took him 9. (out) oftener and kept him out longer, and 10. (by) and by Tommy got so he could 11. (stay) out a good while if he was 12. (in) the wet grass. Then the Indian found 13. (he) could leave him in the wet grass 14. (all) night, and pretty soon that trout could 15. (live) in the shade whether the grass was 16. (wet) or not. By that time

he had 17. (got) pretty tame, too and he used to 18. (follow) the Indian around a good deal, and 19. (when) the Indian would go out to dig 20. (worms) for him, Tommy would go along and 21. (pick) up the worms for himself. The Indian 22. (thought) everything of that fish, and when Tommy 23. (got) so he didn't need water at all, 24. (but) could go anywhere - down the dusty road 25. (and) stay all day out in the hot 26. (sun) - you never saw the Indian without his 27. (trout). Show people wanted to buy Tommy but 28. (the) Indian said he wouldn't sell a fish 2. (like) that for any money. You'd see him 30. (coming) to town with Tommy following along in 31. (the) road behind, just like a dog, only 32.(of) course it traveled a good deal like 33. (a) snake and most as fast.

Well it 34. (was) pretty sad the way that Indian lost 35. (his) trout, and it as curious too. He 36. (started) for town one day with Tommy coming 37. (along) behind, as usual. There was a bridge 38. (in) the road and when the Indian came 39. (to) it he saw there was a plank 40. (off), but he went on over it without 41. (thinking). By and by he looked around for 42. (Tommy) and Tommy wasn't there. He went back 43. (a) ways and called, but he couldn't see 44. (anything) of his pet. Then he came to 45. (the) bridge and saw the hole, and he 46. (thought) right away that maybe his trout had 47.(got) in there. So he went to the 48. (hole) and looked down, and sure enough, there 49. (was) Tommy floating

on the water, bottom-side up. 50. (He'd) tumbled through that hole into the brook and drowned."

Angling in America. (Houghton Mifflin Company)